

For Immediate Release

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WASHINGTON DC – (Today) Congressman Michael Honda (D-CA), chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, introduced the bi-partisan Viral Hepatitis and Liver Cancer Control and Prevention Act of 2009, to address a national Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C epidemic impacting America. The bill incorporates the monitoring, testing and research and education provisions contained in the Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C bills from the 110th Congress. Rep Honda's bi-partisan legislation was drafted in strong partnership with Reps. Charles Dent (R-PA), Edolphus Towns (D-NY), William Cassidy (R-LA), David Wu (D-OR) and Anh "Joseph" Cao (R-LA). They are joined as original co-sponsors by Reps. Todd Platts (D-PA), Delegate Donna M. Christensen (D-VI), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Bobby Rush (D-IL), Judy Chu (D-CA), and G.K. Butterfield (D-NC).

Rep Honda, chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, said, "Chronic Hepatitis B and C are silent killers, poised to strike millions of Americans and it is time for Congress to act in a concerted effort to educate particularly vulnerable communities as well as the general public. For example, due to a number of factors, Asian American & Pacific Islanders have a much higher prevalence rate of hepatitis B and develop liver cancer at a much higher rate than other ethnic groups. However, few in the AAPI community are aware of their risk factors or about how to manage or treat the disease. This bipartisan bill judiciously invests federal money in a balanced, comprehensive approach to viral hepatitis education, prevention, treatment, and management and I look forward to working to pass this legislation."

The Viral Hepatitis and Liver Cancer Control and Prevention Act of 2009 brings together the common concerns of the diverse viral hepatitis community to create a surveillance system to track chronic Hepatitis B and C infections; support activities to promote early detection and education, particularly in vulnerable populations, and incorporate them into existing clinical programs at the state, federal, and tribal level; and conduct research on improved treatments and vaccines; and meet other needs of the Hepatitis community as identified by advocacy groups.

Rep Dent: "Hepatitis B and C are treatable diseases when detected early and properly managed. Without detection and intervention, this silent disease develops into chronic viral hepatitis which is costly at best and deadly at worst. This bill makes a wise investment by focusing federal efforts to heighten awareness, promote prevention, enhance coordination, and increase research. I am proud to join this effort which demonstrates Congress's commitment to the elimination of chronic viral hepatitis."

Rep Towns: “Viral hepatitis is a critical health issue that needs the nation’s attention. I am deeply committed to raising awareness about viral hepatitis which disproportionately infects underserved and underrepresented minorities, and often goes undetected. Therefore, I am proud to support this legislation that will be helpful in the ongoing effort to treat and prevent this condition.”

Rep Wu: “This bill establishes a comprehensive, coordinated strategy for hepatitis prevention, education, research, and medical management programs by federal agencies in order to bring the full horse-power of the government to bear on this important public health issue. Hepatitis infections disproportionately affect Asians and Pacific Islanders, African Americans, and Hispanic populations in the United States. For example, although they represent only four percent of the U.S. population, Asian and Pacific Islanders account for over half of the 1.4 million chronic hepatitis B cases. It is vital that minority populations received the care they need in an appropriate and effective manner, and this legislation will help make sure that happens.”

Rep Cao: “Unfortunately, Chronic Viral Hepatitis disproportionately affects certain populations, such as lower income, Asian-Pacific, and African American populations. As a Vietnamese-American and the representative of Orleans and Jefferson Parishes, I have seen the faces and know the names behind these statistics of high incidence and mortality rates in the demographics I represent, especially given limited access to and availability of resources. Fortunately, Chronic Viral Hepatitis is treatable when detected early and properly managed, and I am glad this bill is comprehensive in its approach to educating about, detecting, and treating Chronic Viral Hepatitis.”

Rep Cassidy: “The lack of awareness for Hepatitis B and C leads to under diagnosis. Those infected risk liver failure which leads to liver transplant or death. As a Hepatologist, I have witnessed firsthand the consequences hepatitis can inflict on a patient’s health, their families and the nation’s health care budget.”

“We have a wave of chronic liver disease that will crash like a tsunami on the United States healthcare system if we do not address this problem now,” said **Lorren Sandt, Chair of NVHR**. “This simple legislation will help identify the people who are chronically infected and get them into treatment, which can save millions in future healthcare costs.”

About Chronic Viral Hepatitis

Hepatitis B and hepatitis C are highly contagious blood borne viruses that cause liver disease,

liver cancer, and premature death. Chronic hepatitis B is treatable when detected early and properly managed. In about 50% of the cases, chronic hepatitis C can be cured.

It is estimated that 2,000,000,000 people worldwide have been infected with the hepatitis B virus, 400 million chronically. Approximately 170 million people worldwide are chronically infected with the hepatitis C virus. An estimated 5.3 million people living in the United States are infected with either hepatitis B or hepatitis C; tragically more than half are unaware of their status.

About the Bill

The Viral Hepatitis and Liver Cancer Control Act would amend the Public Health Service Act to establish, promote, and support a comprehensive prevention, research, and medical management referral program for chronic hepatitis B and chronic hepatitis C virus infection. The bill, with a price tag of 90 million in 2011 will increase the ability of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support state health departments in their prevention, immunization and surveillance efforts. The CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis has been underfunded in comparison with other CDC programs within the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. The following numbers show the dramatic difference in funding levels. **HIV:** \$297 million to state and local health departments for prevention programs; \$55.6 million to state and local health departments for surveillance; **\$692 million total (FY'09)**

STD: \$115 million to state and local health departments for Comprehensive STD Prevention Systems; **\$152.3 million total (FY'09)**

TB: \$85 million to state and local health departments for Prevention and Control; \$7.6 million to state and local health departments for Laboratories; **\$143.8 million total (FY'09)**

Hepatitis: \$5 million to state and local health departments; **\$18.3 million total (FY '09)**

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